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SINGLE SOLDIERS WITH V CORPS TRANSPORTATION COMPANY FIND FAMILY IN UNIT, BUDDIES, MISSION

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VILSECK, Germany – Soldiers of the 41st Transportation Company of V Corps' 3rd Corps Support Command are beginning the first leg of their journey from their home station here to Iraq for a second round of driving and fighting in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Though there were many hugs, kisses and tears from families, loved ones and friends, in one corner a group of Soldiers napped on duffle bags, joked and worked on their rucksacks with quiet resolve.

These were the single Soldiers who have no family or close friends nearby.



SPC FRANCIS HORTON

As other members of his unit say goodbye to families, loved ones and friends, single Soldier Pfc. Larry Thomas loads up his rucksack, making sure he has everything assigned to him. Thomas's unit, V Corps' 41st Transportation Company, departed for its second tour in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Pfc. Larry S. Thomas is a driver for the 41st. He is a bachelor without a child, parent or significant other to see him off. He lives in a barracks with other Soldiers.

Single Soldiers such as Thomas are often absent from the reports of departing and returning Soldiers featured on the front pages of newspapers and on TV. Thomas says he is confident of his company's abilities, but feels this deployment would be much different for him if he had a son or daughter remaining at home to worry about.

"This would be more difficult with family there," Thomas says, "But I'm doing an important duty, and that would make it easier."

It's a double-edged sword for single troops such as Thomas. While the private may not have a wife or girlfriend here to kiss goodbye, neither does he have to feel the sting of leaving a wife behind. Many of his fellow troops are not so lucky. He said one of his best friends has to leave his wife alone for a second time.

Thomas has a plan to help him through the tougher times.

"I want to keep (my) mind on the mission as much as possible. It will make the deployment go faster," Thomas says.

He said living close to his fellow Soldiers in the barracks also keeps his spirits high, and has helped him learn to live with and trust every member of his team.

"I don't feel bad about this deployment," Thomas says. "I just want to come back with everyone I went down with."

"Living in the barracks, you learn to live with and trust everyone."

This is Thomas' second deployment to Iraq, and he and other veteran Soldiers are making sure to help out the younger and less experienced troops as much as possible, he says.

"We're trying to teach the others what to expect over there," he says.

Just because unmarried troops may not have loved ones nearby to say goodbye to, doesn't mean they don't have them in mind.

"I think about my sister in Florida all of the time," says Sgt. Vanessa Kempf, a driver for the 41st.

Kempf also said that while her family is far away from home station, she knows others are close to theirs, and says she plans to do what she can while deployed to watch out for any other Soldier in trouble.

Spc. Isaiah Ward is also a driver headed for his second deployment. And like Kempf, he said he knows how difficult it is for his friends and battle buddies to leave their loved ones, and wants to help get them through it.

"I'm going to try to keep my friends from living in a fantasy that will depress them, and help them keep perspective on the mission," Ward says.

While some new Soldiers worry about their first deployments, some also said that fear is assuaged by the experience of their comrades and their confidence in their training.

"We've trained in driving in (Iraq), and done convoy live-fire training," Kempf says.

Driver Pvt. 2 Sibryan Deleon has only spent nine months in the Army -- three with the 41st -- but he says he is keeping a cool head about the deployment.

"I'll worry about things as they come up," Deleon says.

He also says he has made sure to tap into all the experience that surrounds him.

"I've asked other Soldiers how to adapt to the environment," he says.

And Deleon said that even if he had family, his feeling about deployment would be no different.

"I've always wanted to be in the military," he said. "My family would know we would be safe."

As the platoons of the 41st loaded their buses and prepared to head to the Deployment Processing Center, the troops carried a look of resolve on their faces.

"I'm not worried about this," Thomas says. "I know the Lord above will protect us."



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Pvt. 2 Sibryan Deleon, a bachelor Soldier with V Corps' 41st Transportation Company, waits in formation to hear his bus number as the company prepares to move out for its second tour in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom

